Libraries & Seniors
Strengthening Services for Older Missourians

The Report and Recommendations of the Task Force on Library Services for Older Adults

Missouri State Library
Office of the Secretary of State

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Background

The Missouri State Library, recognizing the population explosion of adults 60 and over in Missouri, and that libraries and librarians play a crucial role in serving Missouri senior citizens, convened a Task Force on Library Services for Older Adults. The charge of this task force was to:

1. identify the issues of providing library services to older adults

2. define the needs of seniors in libraries

3. identify the rewards and barriers to providing services to individuals aged 65 or over

4. promote planning in libraries and other agencies to provide and enhance senior services and cooperative projects

5. develop a plan for presentation to the Secretary's Council on Library Development

In April 1997, a survey was sent to all Missouri public libraries to determine baseline information on library service to Missourians aged 65 and over. Thirty, or 21 percent, of the libraries responded to the survey on the state of services to seniors. During the fall of 1997, Forums on Library Services for Senior Adults were held in locations around the state. These forums gave librarians an opportunity to explore how their libraries can develop or improve services to senior adults.

Demographics

➤ In 1995, the estimated population of Missourians aged 60 and over was 959,000.

➤ By 2025, that number is expected to grow by over 74 percent, when the over 60 population will reach over 1.5 million. At that point in time close to 27 percent of Missouri citizens will be 60 years old or more.

➤ By 2020, Missouri citizens aged 85 and older will make up 2 percent of the population, numbering over 129,000.

➤ Thirty-five of our 114 counties will see a gain of 50 percent to over 100 percent growth of persons 60 and over. Currently, 32 percent of Missouri's elderly live in rural areas.

➤ Additionally, the number of Black, Hispanic and other minorities will make up the fastest growing segments of Missouri's aging population. From 1995 to 2025, the number of Hispanics 60 and over is expected to grow by almost 300 percent.

➤ According to 1990 census statistics, over 16 percent of Missourians

65 years and older have mobility limitations. While no projections are available regarding how this statistic will change, it is likely that as the number of aged Missourians increases, the percentage of those with conditions that limit their ability to use traditional library services may also increase.

Issues of providing library services to older adults

The Task Force identified six key issues regarding providing library services to older Missourians. These are:

1. Diversity of the population

2. Planning library services

3. Promoting library services

4. Training library staff

5. Automation and technology

6. Agency collaboration

These issues provide a framework for the recommendations made by the Task Force. A discussion of each issue follows.

Diversity

In more ways than one, diversity is the key word in describing Missouri seniors aged 60 and over, and no generalizations can be made to characterize them. Like other age groups, seniors in Missouri encompass people with different levels of needs, abilities, interests and resources. And, to make planning library services more difficult, the characteristics of the aged population of the future are likely to be quite different than those of today's population. The "aging population" may range in age from 60 to over 100, a span of more than forty years. Obviously, this broad range may encompass a great variety of characteristics: working to retired, parents to grandparents, mobile to physically impaired or homebound, reader to non-reader. Libraries can play a role in developing services that stress this diversity and provide continuity in the lives of seniors during the aging process.

Planning Library Services

Although public libraries have developed ways to serve older adults for more than 50 years, services to the aged have not kept pace with the aging population growth. While many innovative programs have been implemented, most have traditionally focused on large print book collections and services to nursing homes and the homebound.[1] The senior services survey conducted by the Missouri State Library in April 1997 indicates that this traditional approach still holds true for the most part. In order to be prepared for the older adult population explosion that is taking place,

libraries need to begin planning now. That means evaluating what services they currently offer, examining the over 60 population in their community, identifying the population's current and future needs, determining what services and programs to implement to meet those needs, and finally, how to evaluate what progress the library has made. And in order to establish a leadership role in serving the elderly, libraries will have to do all of the above, while breaking through old paradigms of library services for senior adults.

Promoting Library Services

Even library staff who serve a large number of seniors recognize there are many more in their community who are not being served. One reason proposed for this phenomenon was that people do not become library users until they need a service the library offers. It is clear, however, that this is neither an adequate nor a sole reason for members of the senior adult community to be non-library users. Libraries clearly must rethink service and marketing strategies and set priorities. They must focus on both current senior library users, as well as infrequent or non-library users. A fresh look at the library's definition of senior adults, as well as an examination of the changing demographics and characteristics of this population and its impact on the library is needed.

Training Library Staff

While in many cases services to older adults is a matter of awareness and focus, library staff that have not developed an understanding of these services will deliver inadequate services. Connie Van Fleet, professor at Louisiana State University, notes that "without the opportunity to develop a knowledge of the older adult population, many librarians fall prey to the fallacy of the illness model of aging."[2] Knowledge of the demographics and diversity of the older adult population, learning abilities and styles of older adults, community services and resources targeted to older adults, and techniques and strategies for adapting materials and services for older adults with disabilities will prepare library staff to plan and provide exemplary and innovative services for seniors in their community. In addition, library staff trained in these areas will become advocates for library services for seniors.

Automation and Technology

A current and explosive trend in libraries is automation and technology. Access to library collections has become automated, as has access to many reference and information sources. Internet connections are common, and library collections themselves are being digitized. A plethora of information about aging and about issues of interest to older adults is available over the Internet. With 30 percent of adults over 55 owning computers,[3] and 19 percent of all Internet users being age 50 or over, seniors' use of technology is an issue that must be addressed by libraries. Over 22,000 adults between the ages of 55 and 100 are members of SeniorNet, a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to build a community of

computer-using seniors. Seniors use computers as business tools, for entertainment and for educational purposes. The Internet provides new avenues for socialization and information exchange. Targeted technology training to meet the technology needs of seniors, adaptive devices that allow easier access to technology, free email accounts, and the creation of senior computer clubs are just some services libraries should consider implementing.

Agency Collaboration

Numerous agencies that provide services for adults 60 and over exist in every Missouri community. Missouri has ten Area Agencies on Aging, each serving a specific geographic area, whose purpose it is to coordinate services and programs for persons 60 and older in each area. Area Agencies on Aging fund local senior centers, transportation, legal assistance and information and referral services. The Division of Aging has staff assigned to every Missouri county. Service to seniors is an area that is ripe for cooperative projects. The ultimate goal of a cooperative project is to make the most effective use of resources while enhancing the quality of seniors' lives. Libraries that seek out, network and partner with other senior-related agencies will be the most successful in planning, funding and implementing innovative programs targeted to older adults.

Defining the Needs of Seniors

The aging population, while changing rapidly, is very similar to the adult population in Missouri and nationwide. The Task Force recognizes that:

1. The needs of older adults, like all segments of the population, are diverse.

2. The demographic factors of the aging population in communities have an impact on seniors' needs.

Diversity

As mentioned previously, diversity characterizes the changing aging society in Missouri and the nation. Their needs are likewise diverse and changing, and it behooves local libraries to recognize and examine this fact. Like most library users, seniors have recreational reading needs, which libraries can meet with their print and non-print resources. A 1994 Needs Assessment survey prepared by the Department of Social Services, the Division of Aging, Area Agencies on Aging, and the University of Missouri-Columbia named information as the number one need identified by Missouri seniors aged 60 and over. Library collections can fulfill many informational and educational needs, as can programs featuring expert speakers on topics for which senior adults want information. Educational and cultural programs and services offered by libraries contribute to life-

long learning needs of seniors. By providing space for groups to meet and pursue personal interests, libraries help fulfill social and personal interest needs. The experience and history that seniors can share through library volunteer opportunities with others provide valuable resources to libraries and communities. Finally, reading itself fulfills more than just a personal or leisure experience. Book discussion programs and the like carry the activity one step further to become an educational and social experience. Recreational reading, information, education, socialization, and sharing time and experience are needs that exist in the senior community that deserve close assessment by the library community.

Demographic Factors

Library communities, in examining the needs of seniors, must take into consideration the same demographic issues they consider for other population groups: age, literacy, population density, socio-economic status, educational attainment and parenting. Age itself is a demographic factor that cannot be omitted from this process, since the needs of a 60 year old library user will differ from those of a 90 year old.

While it is important for library staff to move away from the illness model of aging, libraries must recognize the special needs of older adults, and especially those of the oldest old. The informational, educational and leisure needs of rural seniors will differ from those of urban seniors. Literacy is an issue that must be examined. Currently, almost 50 percent of Missourians over 60 have no high school diploma. While nationwide the aging population will be better educated in the next 20 years, each community must look closely at the 60 and over population it serves. At issue also is parenting. The census bureau reports that nationwide 4 million grandchildren live with their grandparents. The largest population of these grandparents is under 60, but the number over 60 is still substantial. Missouri grandparents raising children "the second time around" have specific informational and educational needs that the library community can meet.

Rewards and Barriers to Providing Services to Seniors

The Task Force took pleasure in discussing the rewards of providing library services for seniors, and also identified barriers that weaken or reduce services libraries may provide for older adults.

Rewards

The rewards realized by libraries serving seniors are numerous. Seniors who serve as literacy trainers, program speakers, storytime assistants, mentors, technology trainers and in other volunteer capacities provide a valuable service to the library and the community with their experience and his-

tory. In much the same way, seniors who use and support their local public libraries serve as valuable advocates for libraries, literacy and lifelong learning. Senior participation in library planning will assist libraries in properly assessing the needs of seniors and implementing appropriate programs. With Missourians 60 and over comprising 18 percent of the state's population, this group can serve as a strong and active voice for library issues to the legislature and local governments.

Barriers   An important barrier to providing services for seniors is a lack of resources, which shows up most strongly in collections, staff and the library's physical environment. In some cases, library collections are inadequate to meet the leisure, information or educational needs of older adults. Many libraries point to a lack of adequate staff to provide special senior services and programs. This may be especially true when libraries seek to provide outreach services to meet the needs of seniors who cannot visit the library. Unlike services to other special populations, such as young people, few library staff qualify as senior services specialists. In addition, little formal training is available in Missouri to prepare library staff for serving an older adult population. A final barrier that prevents libraries from providing services revolves around ergonomics. The American Disabilities Act has played a major role in eliminating many physical barriers. However, inadequate lighting, unstable or uncomfortable seating, shelving which requires reaching or bending, and a lack of adaptive devices to enable older adults to use print or non-print resources present barriers to potential library users over 60.

Task Force Recommendations

The Task Force on Library Services for Older Adults proposes a three-dimensional plan to enhance and develop library services for Missouri seniors.

1. Target improvement of planning library services for seniors, and recognize libraries that implement effective and innovative programs.

2. Make sure seniors get the message about library services in appealing ways; provide libraries with tools and training for marketing their services.

3. Use federal and state grant funds to further the development of library services for seniors.

Actions within the following sections detailing the recommendations are noted for implementation during Phase 1 or Phase 2 of the plan.

Planning Recommendations

The Planning Recommendations use three avenues to promote planning for library services for older adults:

➤ A Resource Manual which would be made available to all public libraries, and to others upon request (*Phase 1*)

➤ Regional Training for library staff that demonstrates how to best use the Resource Manual (*Phase 2*)

➤ Annual Awards for new programs designed for seniors (*Phase 1*)

The Resource Manual

The manual will be a tool for all libraries and a resource for planning and evaluation. The manual will support the topics covered in the training sessions, but will be designed so that it can also be used on its own. The manual would need to be updated on a regular basis, and it is suggested that it should be published in loose-leaf form, which would easily accommodate updates. It should include the following:

➤ An overview of the demographics which make planning for providing services for older adults imperative

➤ A directory of state, federal and private agencies which could provide useful information, materials or services in planning for providing services for older adults, such as the Area Agency on Aging and the Association of American Retired Persons. Whenever possible, contact names and web sites should be included

➤ A guide to identifying local agencies which could provide useful information, materials or services in planning for providing services for older adults, such as churches and home health care providers

➤ Information and guidelines on forming effective partnerships with these agencies to fulfill the needs of older adults

➤ Information and advice on how to involve local citizens, particularly the older adults, in planning for providing services for older adults through surveys, focus groups and other appropriate means

➤ A bibliography of literature and other information sources which would be useful in planning and implementing services for older adults, such as books, journal articles, etc.

Regional Training

Regional training would provide illustrative examples of best practices and how to put the information provided in the Resource Manual to work. To further extend the reach of the training, it is recommended that a "train the trainer" approach be taken. Although many other topics would be useful and appropriate, some examples of training topics would be:

➤ Presentations by libraries who have experience and success in providing services for older adults, including presentations by winners of the Annual Awards

➤ Discussion of developmental states of older adults, learning stages, and "ageism"

> Presentations by agencies providing services to older adults

> Information on how to form productive partnerships and work effectively with agencies providing services to older adults

> Advice on developing intergenerational programming

Annual Awards

In order to encourage continued progress in services for older adults, it is recommended that annual awards, such as plaques and/or monetary awards, be presented to libraries who have implemented outstanding new programs or services for older adults in the previous year. Different libraries have different means. Therefore, awards would be made in several categories according to the size of the library. The award process should carry with it collaboration with another agency as an element of eligibility.

As a means of further honoring the recipient and bringing public attention to the outstanding work of the chosen libraries, it is recommended that the libraries make a presentation describing their award-winning programs at the Governor's Conference on Aging. An overview of award winning programs and services should be incorporated into Resource Manual updates.

The American Association for Retired Persons has committed to sponsor a statewide award.

Marketing Recommendations

In order to promote library services for seniors to library personnel, trustees and the general public, three major marketing recommendations are made:

> A marketing kit for libraries (*Phase 2*)

> A statewide marketing effort (*Phase 2*)

> Technology utilization (*Phase 2*)

Involvement of older Missourians is critical to the development of any of these marketing efforts.

Marketing Kit for Libraries

This recommendation serves to educate both library personnel and the general public. The kit is envisioned as "marketing the library in a box" which will include the following components:

> Stand-alone pieces such as public service announcements, news releases, fliers, brochures, posters, bookmarks, and news articles

> A logo or slogan developed for use on print products that focuses on library services for senior adults

> A speaker's bureau, localized by the communities served and staffed with librarians and volunteers who present information to external groups

> Tips and ideas for marketing to senior audiences: library senior services messages on tray liners and table tents at restaurants and on grocery store bags; distribution of information and materials with Meals On Wheels deliveries; sponsorship of a "Grandparents Day at the Library" and other intergenerational activities

Statewide Marketing Effort

The development of the statewide marketing effort for small, medium and large public libraries will target general audiences and may include the following:

> A proclamation by the governor or lieutenant governor proclaiming Library Services for Seniors Week in Missouri

> Development of a slide advertisement for showing in movie theatres

> Development of a video news release on library services for seniors

> Scheduling a series of radio/cablevision television interviews for spokespersons to discuss library services for seniors and accessibility; interviews could be scheduled in either targeted areas or statewide

> Securing of a toll-free telephone number for persons to get information about library services for seniors

> Participation in future Governor's Conferences on Aging through exhibits, sessions, or both

> Utilization of special events, such as Older Americans Month in May to keep the library services for seniors campaign energized; i.e., May as Senior Read-A-Book-A-Week Month

Technology Utilization

This component of the marketing recommendations will utilize state of the art technology to advance interactive relationships between libraries and their senior populations. Some examples may be to:

> Develop a home page (local library specific) with a link to the Missouri State Library website. The "local" homepage would identify services/activities for seniors

> Develop a website specifically designed for seniors and accessing services statewide to which local libraries could link

> Develop senior book clubs utilizing the Internet (i.e., book club "chat rooms" as well as other interactive type activities)

> Develop computer courses for seniors and encourage joining Internet book clubs and other activities

> Provide the Resource Manual and its updates online

Grant Funds Recommendations

In *Charting Missouri's Library Future: Into the New Century*, the long range plan for library services for the next five years, the State Library provides direction for improving current library services and cooperation between libraries and other agencies.[4] Furthermore, the "Missouri Five-Year State Plan for the Use of Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Funds" targets improvement of library services and cooperation as key goals.[5] The Task Force recommends that the State Library continue using federal funds to further the development of library services for seniors.

➤ Continue to target senior services as a priority item for cooperative grants funded through the Library Services and Technology Act. Cooperative grants, available to eligible Missouri libraries and library consortia for cooperative programs involving several libraries or other partnering agencies, should encourage unique and innovative approaches to developing and enhancing services to seniors (*Phase 1*)

➤ Encourage library applications for Library Services and Technology Act funds for adaptive and assistive devices to provide information access for use by persons with disabilities in the local library communities (*Phase 1*)

Conclusion

This plan, that incorporates training, planning, promotion and cooperation, serves as a starting point for Missouri libraries to reach out to Missourians 60 years and older. Enhancement of services to seniors can only result in positive benefits for Missouri libraries and the communities in which they reside, promoting the positive impact libraries can have on the quality of life from birth to old age. The recommendations advocated by this task force can result in more effective and innovative library programs and services for older adults.

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